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Letter dated 10 February 2003 from the Permanent Representative of Iraq to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

On instructions from my Government, I am transmitting to you a letter dated 9 February 2003 from Mr. Naji Sabri, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Iraq, concerning the television interview with His Excellency Mr. Saddam Hussein, President of the Republic of Iraq, with Mr. Tony Benn, a British former Labour Member of Parliament and Minister. The letter contains a full clarification of the position of Iraq with respect to the implementation of the resolutions of the Security Council.

I should be grateful if you would have this letter and its annex distributed as a document of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Mohammed A. **Aldouri**
Permanent Representative

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Annex to the letter dated 10 February 2003 from the Permanent Representative of Iraq to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to transmit to you the details of the television interview with Mr. Saddam Hussein, President of the Republic of Iraq, with Mr. Tony Benn, a British former Labour Member of Parliament and Minister, which was published in the news media on 4 February 2003. It contains a full and accurate clarification of the essence of Iraq's position with respect to the elimination of weapons of mass destruction and also concerning the allegations made against Iraq.

The President of the Republic of Iraq clarified Iraq's position with respect to Security Council resolution 1441 (2002) and other Security Council resolutions relating to disarmament. The President said: "Iraq has no weapons of mass destruction whatsoever. We challenge anyone who claims that we have to bring forward any supporting evidence and present it to public opinion." He added that: "If the purpose is to make sure that Iraq is free of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons [the inspectors] can do that. These weapons are not aspirin tablets which a person can hide in his pocket. These are weapons, weapons of mass destruction and it is therefore easy to establish whether Iraq has or does not have chemical, biological and nuclear weapons. We have said many times before, and we say it again today, that Iraq is free of such weapons."

The President also stated that it is in Iraq's interest to facilitate the mission of the inspectors to find the truth and he cautioned against the attempt by certain parties to use the inspections as a pretext for aggression, referring to the dangers of the non-respect by the United States of America and the United Kingdom for the Charter of the United Nations and their headlong rush towards war and the destruction of others. The President also called for real respect for the principles of the Charter based on the distinction between truth and falsehood rather than on opportunism and force, recalling that truth is the basis of human relations. He also called for the approach involving aggressive power in international relations to be replaced by cooperation in order to ensure peace and security on the basis of justice for all humanity.

In reply to a question from Mr. Tony Benn concerning the allegations of Iraq's relationship with the al-Qa'idah organization the President said: "I wish to tell you plainly and, through you, to tell anyone who is listening and wants to know, that we have no relationship with al-Qa'idah".

The positions stated by the President of the Republic are a clear exposition of Iraq's policy and positions. His statements are an excellent response to those who make empty accusations about alleged activities involving weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, or about Iraq's lack of political will to cooperate with the inspectors, or about Iraq's alleged relationship with al-Qa'idah. When the leader of Iraq says something, he means it.

I am transmitting herewith for your information the text of the interview.

(*Signed*) Naji **Sabri**
Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Iraq

Meeting between President Saddam Hussein and Mr. Tony Benn, former British Cabinet Minister, on 3 February 2003

Mr. Tony Benn: Peace and the mercy of God be upon you.

The President: Peace and the mercy and blessing of God be upon you.

Mr. Tony Benn: Shall I begin now?

The President: Before you begin to ask questions, I must welcome you to Baghdad.

Mr. Tony Benn: Iraq is the cradle of our civilization, the cradle of human civilization. My coming here is coloured by the perception and recollection of historical matters, of the history of Iraq and of the contributions made by Iraqis to building human civilization. But the main reason I have come to meet you in Iraq is to consider matters with you in the hope that you will help to show us ways of achieving peace. I remember the rigours of war and was witness to a distressing war in which I lost a brother and many relatives. I never wish to see another war in my time. There are millions of people all over the world who do not want to see a war and I therefore believe that your agreement to this televised meeting is very important. I hope you will help me by telling the world something significant and positive about the situation in which we find ourselves.

The President: First of all, welcome to Baghdad. You are well aware of the role that Iraqis have set themselves, inspired by their history, their civilization and the role they have played in human history. But in order for that role to prosper and bear fruit, it is necessary for there to be peace. That being so, just as Iraqis are committed to their own rights, they also consider the rights of mankind as a whole, and just as they want peace, they believe that humanity as a whole also needs peace and they know that, in order for them to play their civilizing and humanitarian role in accordance with their beliefs, they need peace, for without peace they will face many obstacles that will prevent them from playing their role in terms of their civilization, their human nature and their beliefs.

Mr. Tony Benn: Mr. President, permit me to ask you some questions to which the entire world is awaiting the answer. These questions will be simple and direct but if you help us by answering them, your response will help you and will support the peace campaign we are conducting.

The first question is: does Iraq have weapons of mass destruction?

The President: You have had dealings with Iraq, and many of your own countrymen have had dealings with it, and in recent years you have visited Iraq more than once and have got to know Iraqi officials as well as Iraqi citizens; you have seen them with your own eyes and you may have met some of them.

Before 1990, Iraq had joint interests and extensive dealings with the United Kingdom. For that reason, and quite apart from Iraq's historical background, any fair-minded person could know, from the evidence and from a consideration of Iraqi history, that Iraqi officials, over the course of 34 years — for they did not come to power a short time before but had been in positions of authority for over 34 years and they had wide-ranging dealings with the outside world — that Iraqi officials, when they say something, their word can be relied on. A short while ago, when you asked me whether I wished to consider the questions before you put them to me

directly, I said that I did not wish to consider them so that we should not waste time by considering them twice and I left it up to you to ask whatever questions you wished directly and immediately so that my answers would not be artificial. The purpose is not to see how we can evade the issue by giving prepared answers to the questions but how to say what is in our minds and hearts and what is part of our planning and policy. I am telling you, and through you the British people and all the voices of peace throughout the world: we say the truth as it is and I am therefore telling you, as I have said on more than one occasion, that Iraq has no weapons of mass destruction whatsoever. We challenge anyone who claims that we have to bring forward any supporting evidence and present it to public opinion.

Mr. Tony Benn: Mr. President, I have another question which is also being raised in the media: does Iraq have links with al-Qa'ida?

The President: If we had a relationship with al-Qa'ida and believed in that relationship we would not be ashamed to admit it. Therefore I wish to tell you plainly, and, through you, to tell anyone who is listening and who wants to know, that we have no relationship with al-Qa'ida.

Mr. Tony Benn: Another question, Mr. President. I should like you to permit me to ask it. It is related to the inspectors. Your answers a short while ago made the position of Iraq entirely clear to me but there appear to be difficulties, or there are reports of the existence of certain difficulties, between Iraq and the inspectors. I should like you to speak about these difficulties and say whether you think they will be overcome after the forthcoming return of Mr. Blix and Mr. ElBaradei to Baghdad.

The President: You are aware that every major activity inevitably encounters some minor incidental difficulties. You have been following the subject of the inspectors and of the resolutions that have been adopted concerning Iraq and you certainly have an opinion and a view as to whether or not these resolutions have anything to do with international law. However, they have been adopted by the Security Council. These resolutions, regardless of whether or how they are implemented, or of the motivation behind their adoption, could lead to a situation of peace or of war. It is therefore a critical situation. There is also the injustice that has been inflicted on the Iraqi people for the past 13 years as a result of the blockade. You know the details and the degree of harm suffered by Iraqis, including children and the elderly, as a result of the shortage of food and medicines, and in other ways. We are thus facing a critical situation. That being so, it is not to be expected that there would be no complaints concerning minor and insignificant issues. Some of them may be connected with matters that are major issues as far as we are concerned and in terms of how we view matters. The Iraqis who are concerned with this subject may therefore complain about the conduct of the inspectors, and they do indeed complain. It is also possible that some inspectors may complain, either for minor reasons of practicality or because of their preconceptions about Iraqis. But every fair-minded person knows that, as regards Iraqi responsibilities, Iraq has been scrupulously complying with resolution 1441 (2002) and also implementing it scrupulously.

However, there remains the question of who raised objections against Iraq or, if Iraq raised objections as to the means of applying the Security Council resolutions, whether the purpose was to achieve peace or to take the questions raised, and any differences that were brought up, as a reason, a pretext and a cover for war or for a disagreement that might lead to war.

As far as Iraq is concerned, when it raises objections against those responsible for having the resolutions of the Security Council implemented, it has no intention of pushing matters towards war. War is not in Iraq's interest and no Iraqi, whether an official or otherwise, has expressed the wish to go to war.

So this brings us to the question that should be put to the other side, namely whether or not the inspectors are looking for a pretext for saying that they have reached a point at which they are obliged to wage war against Iraq. If the purpose is to make sure that Iraq is free of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons, then they can do that. These weapons are not aspirin tablets which a person can hide in his pocket. These are weapons, weapons of mass destruction and it is therefore easy to establish whether Iraq has or does not have chemical, biological and nuclear weapons.

We have said many times before, and we say it again today, that Iraq is free of such weapons. If the intention of resolution 1441 (2002), as our friends and others have been telling us, was to enable the Security Council to ascertain whether Iraq had or had not produced weapons of this kind in the absence of the inspectors since 1998 ... well, the inspectors came to Iraq and we agreed to go along with resolution 1441 (2002) so as to show to the whole world that Iraq is free of weapons of mass destruction.

So, when Iraq objects to the conduct of the inspection teams or others concerned with the implementation of the resolution, its purpose is not to put obstacles in their way to prevent them from getting to the truth. It is in our interest to facilitate their mission to find the truth.

There remains the question whether the other side wants to get to the truth or whether it wants to make any situation, statement or argument into a pretext for aggression. If those concerned want this, that is within their power. The super-Powers and large States can create a pretext any day to claim that Iraq has failed to implement resolution 1441 (2002) just as they said earlier that Iraq had not implemented the previous resolutions. Now, apparently, after this long period of time, it appears that Iraq had complied with the resolutions with which they claimed it had not complied. The proof of this is that they are now concentrating on the latest resolution and not on the previous ones.

I have answered you at length, so please bear with me. This is the only time I have met with the outside media and, in order to inform you fully of the situation I wish to talk about, I have to speak in somewhat long sentences.

Mr. Tony Benn: Mr. President, if you will permit me I shall broaden out the previous question to cover the relations between Iraq and the United Nations and the prospect for peace because, as I said, I belong to a generation that witnessed the horrors of war and I witnessed the signing of the Charter of the United Nations. I clearly recall the preamble to the Charter which still rings in my ears which says: "We, the peoples of the United Nations, determined to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, which twice in our lifetime has brought untold sorrow to mankind ...".

As I recall these words, which I have heard and read, I ask myself whether, with all the difficulties we are now witnessing, you think it possible for the United Nations to attain this objective which it set itself for the benefit of mankind, and not just for the benefit of Iraq. It is true that there are now problems of the sanctions and

the resolutions against Iraq but in fact there is a more important question with regard to the relationship with the United Nations and there is a question that must be asked, namely whether we, the people of the world, can use this Organization, with all its imperfections, in the service of mankind. I think that your opinion on this matter will be of great importance if it were broadcast in the information media.

The President: The principle to which you referred is to be found in the United Nations Charter. As you know, Iraq was one of the founders of the Charter, or rather among its first signatories. This is a fine humanitarian principle. I do not think that there is a single normal person, one who respects his people and has its well-being and security at heart, who respects mankind and has its well-being and security at heart, who does not believe in this principle. But, as politicians, we represent our people in the same way as any other signatory. We must ask all those who signed, or rather all those who played a major role in bringing the Charter into existence, foremost among them the major States, whether they signed the Charter in response to the mindset that was one of the causes of the Second World War or the two world wars, or whether they believed in this principle and had in mind in that context the state of affairs that now belongs to the past, and had it in mind also for the future. Did they want that for the future or was that principle shaped in the light of the psychological impact of the two world wars?

It seems to me that the representatives of some of the major States and super-Powers no longer respect this principle. If we consider the representatives of two major States, namely the United States of America and the United Kingdom, what do they say? How do they behave? And how do they speak of war and peace? And in what language? In our view they are motivated by war rather than by what they say about their responsibilities for peace. And when they speak of their responsibility for peace, what they are doing is accusing others. They say that they are defending peace but what they want is to destroy others because they are defending peace in the interest of their people. You know as well as I do that what they are saying is not true. Yes, the world could apply this principle if it accorded it genuine respect not based on opportunism and power but on right and wrong, in other words based on the right to confront wrong. When we make truth the basis of our human relations we are respecting this principle and adherence to it becomes simple because anyone violating the principle will be unable to conceal the fact and will be exposed to public opinion.

Mr. Tony Benn: Mr. President, your analysis is very clear. I am an optimist and I think that principles are of enduring value and that we must therefore try to bring the United Nations back to its principles.

Now permit me to turn to another subject, the subject of oil. There are many people who believe that the present conflict, the present crisis, is about oil and I should like you to say something about this matter and about your view of the development of Iraq's enormous oil reserves, first for the benefit of Iraq and next for the needs of mankind as a whole. I should also like you to be so kind as to say a little about the aid programmes offered in recent years by Iraq to the States of the third world in terms of its oil resources.

The President: When we speak of oil in this region of the world we must certainly not forget that we are part of the world: we sell to it and we buy from it and we share common interests — economic, cultural, scientific and technical and in every aspect of life.

So, we do not think it is wise for anyone, even those who have resources like the resources of the United States of America, to think that they can do without the world, unless they are not living on the same planet. But if they are on the same planet and speak of the possibility of doing without the rest of the world, the least you can say is that such a statement shows a lack of judgement.

The principles which we were just talking about, and which you are talking about, such as the principles of justice, freedom, the rights of others and one's own rights, ... when we are talking about that, we are doing so within the framework of what we have learned, what God has taught us, each according to his religion. When we speak of the importance of cooperation with respect to the world, it is not necessary for everyone to recall the rights of others while recalling their interests. That being so, it appears that the authorities in the United States of America are motivated by a kind of aggression against the people of the region that has been evident for more than a decade. The first factor in that context is the role played by influential people in successive United States administrations in the decisions taken by the President of the United States based on sympathy with the Zionist entity that was created at the expense of the rights of Palestine, the security and humanity of the Palestinian people. Such people force the hand of the United States administration by claiming that the Arabs are a danger to Israel, without remembering their obligation to God and how the Palestinian people were driven out of their homeland. Successive United States administrations have been led down a path of hostility and aggression against the people of this region, including the Iraqi people who are part of it.

The second factor is that these people and others have been telling the United States administrations, particularly the current one, that if you want to control the world you have to control the oil. The most important requirement for controlling the oil is the destruction of Iraq and of the will of the people of Iraq since the Iraqis are committed to, and believe in, the principles of nationality and are committed to their rights as enshrined in the United Nations Charter and in international law.

It seems that this analysis has appealed to some United States administrations, particularly the current one, namely that if they control oil in the Middle East, they control the world. They could thus tell China what rate of growth is necessary for its economy to grow, what approaches should be allowed in its education system, and they could do the same to France, Germany and perhaps Russia and Japan. They could even do the same to the United Kingdom and its friends if its oil was not sufficient to meet its needs.

So it seems to me that one of the main motives of the hostility of the current United States administration is the wish to control the world. On the basis of this analysis, which has now become clear to the whole world, some officials in the United States administration have started to announce, in one form or another, that one of their main objectives is the control of oil in the Middle East region.

The question is why should the word "control", and the means of control and the policy of control and hostility — why should that not be replaced by the word "cooperation". So who ensures the ability of the United States to control the oil of the Middle East through aggression, and through destruction and causing injury to peoples? Why do people not say, as they are entitled to do, that the hostility of United States administrations against the region, if it continues, will lead to widespread enmity and resistance as a result of which it will not be possible to

develop the oil fields or oil production or extensive economic cooperation between us as members of the human family when there is war, killing, destruction and death? Surely every one of us is entitled to ask questions and, indeed, to say outright that this approach will not lead anywhere and is not even in the interest of the United States or its people. It may serve some short-term interests and the interests of some influential forces in the United States, but we cannot say that it serves the long-term interests of the American people or those of other nations.

I would add that over 10 years ago we made this analysis of the interests of United States administrations and of the pressures exerted on those administrations to move in that direction by forces with their own agendas. Unfortunately, there was no one at that time who shared our analysis but now I think that there are many who do so. If our analysis is right, surely Iraq deserves a humanitarian prize from all people on Earth, including those of the United States and the United Kingdom, instead of being subjected to criminal aggression and destruction committed by those involved against Iraq and the Iraqi people.

Mr. Tony Benn: Mr. President, I thank you first of all for your outstanding generosity in allowing me such a long time. However, I have one last question. There are tens of millions, maybe hundreds of millions, of people in the United States and the United Kingdom and Europe, and throughout the world, who want and hope for a peaceful outcome to this problem. They are the real Americans, the real British, the real French and the real Germans because they think of the world in terms of their children. I have 10 children and grandchildren who have Irish, Indian, Scottish and Jewish blood, some of my grandchildren are Muslims. For me, politics is about ensuring the future survival of those children. I wonder whether you could say something to the peace movement of the world that might help to advance the cause they have in mind.

The President: First of all, we very much admire the development of the peace movement around the world in the last few years. We pray to almighty God to empower all those people throughout the world who are working against war and for the cause of peace and security on the basis of justice for all. Through you we say to the British people that Iraqis do not hate the British people. Before 1991, Iraq had normal relations with the United Kingdom just as it had normal relations with the United States. At that time, the British Government had no reason to speak ill of Iraq as we hear some voices doing these days.

We hope the British people will tell those who hate Iraqis and wish them harm that there is no justification for this. I am telling you, and I ask you to tell the British people, because they are brave, that Iraqis are also brave. Every member of a deep-rooted civilization throughout history has inevitably been brave. I am aware that all peoples of the world want the world to live in peace, and so do the Iraqi people. But just as the world endeavours to safeguard its rights, so the Iraqi people strive to safeguard their rights and to ensure that the world respects them just as they respect the world.

I also ask you to tell the British people that if the Iraqis are subjected to humiliation and aggression they will fight courageously and steadfastly just as the British people did in the Second World War defending their country courageously and steadfastly, each in their own way.

The Iraqis do not want war but if aggression is inflicted on them and if their dignity is offended, they will defend their country, their dignity, the sovereignty and their security.

God willing, humanity and the people of the world will not be let down by our humane outlook and conduct and by the courage we display in defence of the principles, the right and the justice in which we believe.

Mr. Tony Benn: Mr. President, thank you very much. Our meeting has been very important because you have, in your own personal words, expressed your views to the world which will hear and see you. It's my hope that there will be no war.

The President: God willing! God willing!

Mr. Tony Benn: I have seen the women of Iraq, and I have seen the children of Iraq playing in the streets, and I know that those children will die if war comes. That's why I hope war will not come. I hope that your participation today will make a contribution towards achieving peace because your participation has been of the greatest importance. I therefore thank you, not only in my own name but also in the name of all those who are working for the cause of peace in Iraq and throughout the world. Thank you.

The President: Convey my greetings to all, convey my greetings to the heroes of the peace movement. I am pleased to have met you and to have seen you in such good health and looking so youthful.

Mr. Tony Benn: Next year I shall be 80 years old but I believe that work brings me physical fitness. I left Parliament two years ago in order to devote my time to politics.

The President: In other words, to the humanitarian principles we have talked about.

(Iraqi News Agency)